



**DEWEY SQUARE GROUP**

**UPDATED  
COMMITTEE STRUCTURE REPORT  
SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL  
COUNCIL-MAYOR GOVERNMENT TRANSITION PROCESS  
MAY 17, 2005**

## **CHARTER SECTION 270 (E)**

*The Council shall have the right to establish committees of the Council and to establish advisory boards and citizen committees as provided for in Charter section 43.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

DSG's report on committee structure addresses the expected needs of the City of San Diego as you continue your transition to a Council-Mayor form of governance. DSG has conducted both academic and anecdotal research, assessing cities throughout the country that our methodology suggests have committee structures that would be applicable to San Diego.

The following report describes in greater detail the methodology used; case studies or "portfolios" of cities that have undergone similar transitions or have committee structures that may be of interest to the San Diego City Council; and recommendations.

The report is organized into six primary sections:

- I. Recommendations
- II. Purpose and Scope of Work
- III. Methodology
- IV. Comparative Analysis (Table)
- V. Portfolios
  - A. Detroit;
  - B. Los Angeles;
  - C. Oakland;
  - D. San Francisco; and
  - E. Seattle
- VI. Conclusions

## **I. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In determining a new structure for San Diego's City Council, DSG was concerned first and foremost that the Council be an effective legislative body. DSG has suggested instituting a system that prevents the concentration of too much decision making authority in the hands of too few Members while allowing the Council to take advantage of small working groups and individuals' expertise, thus balancing competing concerns. We began by evaluating San Diego's current committee structure under the assumption that the Council has already developed a system that is appropriate for its needs. Our recommendations alter, but do not wholly reform, the Council's existing structure.

### **1. Committees**

DSG recommends that San Diego establish five standing committees. The reasons for doing so are as follows:

From our knowledge of other legislatures, we view the finance and rule making committees as being particularly powerful. For this reason DSG determined that the Members who handle Council Rules and Government oversight should not be the same group of Members who are responsible for vetting the financial decisions of the Council. DSG also views land use, city services, and environmental protection as high priority functions of the City Council. This led to the five committee structure recommendation. DSG also recommends jurisdictional assignments that coincide with San Diego's existing structure. The functional descriptions listed below were pulled from the city website. This was done to ensure that the suggested committees cover, at a minimum, the responsibilities that are currently handled.

In determining the number of members who sit on committees, DSG initially looked to San Diego's current structure, which has 23 committee positions (with one current vacancy.) We did not include the existing Budget Review Committee because it is not identified as a standing committee and is composed of all members of the City Council. Our preliminary report suggested a similar number of standing committee positions. The result was a preliminary recommendation of five committees comprised of four members, except for the Rules and Budget committees that would each have five. DSG recommends making the Budget committee a standing committee rather than a committee of the whole and that it be larger than the other committees to take into consideration the views and preferences of a larger proportion of the Council. The larger each committee is, the more members have control over legislation in a given issue area; however, the more committees each member will be required to serve on, the slower the decisions making process will be.

Through conversations with Council Members and their staffs, DSG learned the Council's desire to serve on no more than two committees. Therefore, we modified our initial recommendation and suggest that each committee have three members, except for the Budget committee, which would have four members. This recommendation will allow for an efficient legislative process given San Diego's

current structure; however, it should be reconsidered if and when the Council increases its size beyond eight members.

Any changes in the current committee structure will necessitate amendments to the Permanent Rules of the Council, which are codified by ordinance. The Council should review these Rules annually for effectiveness. This duty should be handled by the Rules Committee.

- A. Rules & Openness & Intergovernmental Relations (3 members)
  - Permanent Rules of Council, City Charter, Intergovernmental Relations, the Ralph M. Brown Act, , Public Records Act, Community Right to Know, Accuracy of Government Information, Citizen's Right to Privacy, Consumer Protection, Efficiency and Effectiveness of Government Services, Nominations, International Airports, Port District, and Interagency/Bi-national and Agreements.
- B. Budget & Finance (4 members)
  - Annual Budget Review, Capital Improvement Programs, Financial Reports, Taxes, Fees, Assessments, and Independent Budget Analyst Reports.
- C. Land Use & Housing Committee (3 members)
  - Planning, Land Use, Affordable Housing, Development Services, General Plan Amendments, Subdivisions, Community Facility Finance, Engineering, Annexations, Transportation Planning, Transit Services, Parking, Building Code/Inspection, Land Development Code, Utilities, Infrastructure Finance, and Housing Commission Quarterly Reports.
- D. City Operations & Neighborhood Services (3 members)
  - Police, Fire, Paramedics, Neighborhood Parks, Recreation Programs, Youth Services, Senior Services, Neighborhood Revitalization, BIDs, Litter Control, MBE/WBE, Community Development Block Grant, Code Enforcement, Graffiti Abatement, and Parking Regulations and Enforcement.
- E. Natural Resources & Culture Committee (3 members)
  - Clean Water Program, Energy, Water, State and Federal Endangered Species Acts, Arts and Culture, TOT, Solid Waste Disposal, Recycling, APCD/Air Quality, Hazardous Waste, MSCP, Regional Parks and Open Space.

## 2. Committee Representation

DSG understands the Council has yet to decide how to select a Council President. The recommendations below for how Council Members are assigned to committees are based on DSG's recommendation that the Council President be selected by a majority vote of the Council and serve for a two-year term.

DSG recommends that the Council President appoint committee chairs, vice chairs and Members for two-year terms beginning in January of each new Council term. Committees should have one chair, one vice-chair and either one or two additional Members. The Budget Committee should be oversized, with four members in order to ensure that more members have a say in the most influential committee.

### 3. Committee Staffing

DSG recommends committees be appointed two staff members—one policy analyst and one fiscal analyst from the Office of Analysis—to ensure that policy and fiscal concerns are handled by experts in their respective fields.

### 4. Committee Process

DSG recommends the Council President refer matters (proposed legislation and hearings) to committees. The committee chairs determine whether and when to calendar matters for the committee's agenda. Committees may report, amend, continue or table legislation, and legislation can be reported with or without recommendation from a committee.

## II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF WORK

DSG was instructed to assist the Council in determining its committee structure as it transitions to the new form of government.

To give the City of San Diego a sense of how other jurisdictions structure their committees, a number of cities and jurisdictions from across the United States were researched and five were chosen to highlight as case studies.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The five chosen cities - Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and Seattle - were selected based on the relationship of committees relative to the Council as a whole and the Council President, city size, form of government and demographic diversity.

Portfolios are provided on each of these jurisdictions along with recommendations based on San Diego's needs and the best practices of the jurisdictions that were studied.

## IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This chart is derived from the preliminary committee structure report and feedback from Council Members and staff. It is meant to give a side-by-side comparison of the key considerations for a committee structure that works with the Council-Mayor form of government. More detailed information is contained in the portfolios.

Function	Detroit	Los Angeles	Oakland	San Francisco	Seattle
Council Members	9	15	8	11	9
Council Committees	4	15	6	6	9
Committee to Council ratio	.45	1	.75	.54	1

Function	Detroit	Los Angeles	Oakland	San Francisco	Seattle
Number of Members per committee	5	3 or 5	4	3	3 (All Councilors can vote on all committees at their discretion)
Oversized committees	0	Budget and Finance; Housing, Community and Economic Development; Public Safety	0	Budget has 5 Members during budget process	Budget has 9 Members during budget process
Number of assignments per member	2	Range between 3-4	4 (Range between 2-4)	2 (Range between 1-3)	3
Appointment power	Presiding Officer, subject to majority vote	Presiding Officer	Presiding Officer, subject to majority vote	Presiding Officer	Council majority vote
Referral power	Council majority	Presiding Officer (Members can request no referral, must pass by 2/3rds vote)	Rules committee (majority may overrule)	Presiding Officer	Presiding Officer
Most legislation referred (not including consent items)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Who determines committee agenda?	Committee Chair	Committee Chair	Committee Chair	Committee Chair	Committee Chair
Committee amendment power	No	Yes	Yes (may report alternative recommendation)	Yes	Yes
Votes needed to report	0	Majority	Majority	Majority	Majority (limited by open voting system)
Committee allowed to report motions with a recommendation to pass	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Committee allowed to report motions with a recommendation to not pass	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Committee allowed to report motions without a recommendation	Yes	Yes (when no majority agreement, requires Council motion to come up for consideration)	May reject for referral to new committee	Yes	Yes

Function	Detroit	Los Angeles	Oakland	San Francisco	Seattle
Other reporting information	Information gathering forums only	None	None	None	Divided report when committee position is not unanimous (position of majority is considered first by the full Council, if no majority position of the chair is considered first)
Force to floor	Not necessary	2/3rds vote of Council	Any member may place on the next Council agenda matters that have been considered by committee but not forwarded to the Council	Council majority after 30 days	Council majority
Committee jurisdiction	Council majority	Council majority	Rules Committee	Council majority	Council majority
Ad hoc, select committees	Presiding Officer	Council majority	Council majority	Council majority, approval by rules committee	Council majority, Presiding Officer
Bills become inactive	1 year from introduction (brought to the floor for adoption or indefinite postponement)	No official date	No official date	6 months from introduction	End of legislative year
Staffing	City clerk, Council-wide staff	Legislative analysts	Executive branch	Legislative analysts	Chair's legislative assistants
Ordinances passed in 2004	46	630	75	305	317

## V. PORTFOLIOS

After researching and reviewing numerous cities, DSG decided to pursue and develop case studies on five cities. DSG began by evaluating the institutional structure of the 10 largest U.S. cities and collected information on the demographic make-up and fiscal capacity of cities that use committees for legislative analysis. The most important factor for including a city in our analysis was a relatively small city council in a relatively large city. While cities like New York and Chicago are large, they also have approximately 50 Council Members, making their committee structure irrelevant for comparison with San Diego. The selected cities provide a range of options in committee structures and were

comparable to San Diego in terms of their Council size, total population, form of government and population diversity. The portfolios detailed below are specific to committee structure and should serve as a useful guide for San Diego.

## **A. DETROIT**

Detroit was chosen as a case study because it has a Council-Mayor form of government, is one of the largest cities in the U.S. and has a relatively small nine-member City Council. Detroit has the weakest committee structure of those considered in our analysis.

Detroit has nine Council Members and four standing committees. The committees are as follows:

- Internal Operations - 5 Members
- Neighborhood and Community Services - 5 Members
- Public Health and Safety - 5 Members
- Economic Development - 5 Members

The Council President appoints committee chairs and Members with Council approval. Each committee has two co-chairs and three additional Members--five Members total. The President is an ex-officio member on all committees. The Council as a whole determines the number of committees and number of committee members. Special committees may be appointed by the President upon the request of any Council Member. Committees meet bi-weekly and are always open for public comment.

Committee staffing is organized by the City Clerk's office. The Clerk assigns two members of its staff to committees each week. Committees can request analysis, information, and assistance from the Fiscal Division, Division of Research and Analysis, Planning Commission and/or Clerk's committee staff.

Standing committees do not amend or vote on legislation; they are purely for information gathering and testimony purposes. One Council Member suggested that at this point the committees do not serve as policy making or enhancing bodies to any great extent. They have devolved into forums for community members to voice their opinions and handle spill over of issues brought up in the committee as a whole.

Measures are referred to committee by resolution of the whole Council; they are not automatically assigned to committee. Proposed legislation, subject hearings, and matters for discussion can be referred to committee. Only some proposed measures will be heard by committee. The committee chair directs measures back to the Council with comment and/or recommendations; however, the measure must be voted on by the Council as a whole.

Detroit's Council may subpoena witnesses, administer oaths, take testimony and require the production of evidence in any matter pending before any of its committees. To complete the ordinance process, at the end of one calendar year following an ordinance's date of introduction, the City Clerk reports any such ordinance pending on the table. The Council President must bring the ordinance to the floor for adoption or



indefinite postponement. Ordinances indefinitely postponed can be reintroduced as new ordinances.

Detroit's committee structure is constantly in flux. The Council is very politicized and divided. A few years ago there was a motion to configure the committee structure with nine committees and place total control over docketing and referral in the hands of the President. One Council Member we spoke to railed against this proposal, saying it would have completely undermined the policy making goals of the Council and would have created a very strong (even dictatorial) President who could effectively block anything the Mayor tried to do. This Council Member also mentioned that the Council does not act as the "Board of Directors" that it needs to be nor does it facilitate the making of policy or have the right mix of efficiency and checks and balances.

Another Council staffer also stated that Detroit's committee structure is "very weak" and that the efforts to try and change the structure and make the committees more effective were opposed by other Council Members who did not want to give the President more power.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE DETROIT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- No bottle necks. Since Committees have so little power they are not able to slow down the legislative process.

#### **WEAKNESSES OF THE DETROIT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Inefficient. Because committees do not evaluate and report on all legislation, Detroit is unable to divide labor among Council Members or take advantage of expertise.
- Ineffective. Committees are seen as more of a formality than a tool by which Council Members can formulate and discuss substantive policy issues.
- Lack of Accountability. Committees are not consistently responsible for all legislation in a particular jurisdiction and are unable to pursue the vision of individual Members or the Council as a whole.

### **B. LOS ANGELES**

Los Angeles was chosen as a case study because it has a Council-Mayor form of government and recently enhanced the power of its executive through a charter revision. It is one of the largest cities in the US and has a diverse population, and it has a committee structure where each Council Member chairs one committee.

Los Angeles has 15 Council Members and 15 standing committees. The committees are as follows:

- Arts, Parks, Health & Aging – 3 Members
- Audits & Governmental Efficiency – 3 Members

- Budget & Finance – 5 Members
- Commerce, Energy & Natural Resources – 3 Members
- Conventions, Tourism, Entertainment Industry & Business Enterprise – 3 Members
- Education & Neighborhoods – 3 Members
- Environmental Quality & Waste Management – 3 Members
- Housing, Community & Economic Development – 5 Members
- Information Technology & General Services – 3 Members
- Personnel – 3 Members
- Planning & Land Use Management – 3 Members
- Public Safety – 5 Members
- Public Works – 3 Members
- Rules & Elections (President chairs) – 3 Members
- Transportation – 3 Members

The Council President appoints committee chairs, vice chairs and members. Each committee has one chair, one vice-chair and between one to three Members. The Budget, Housing Community and Economic Development, and Public Safety committees are oversized relative to the other committees. Ad hoc committees are also created by the Council. Some committees meet once a week, others twice a month and others once a month. The oversized committees meet once a week.

Committees are staffed by 10 legislative analysts. The Chief Legislative Office (CLA) staff is assigned to committees depending on their specialization. Specifically, a list of all council committees, relative departments and commissions is compiled. Next, the Council looks at the content of motions and directs the legislative analysts to the most applicable committee.

Los Angeles' committees must post agendas 72 hours before meetings. Committees can consider items not on the agenda by 2/3rds vote if need for action arose after the posting of the agenda. Committees must provide an opportunity in open meeting for the public to address each agenda item or the committee itself.

Measures are referred to committee by the Council President. The President can refer ordinances to multiple committees for separate or joint action. Committees report their findings and recommendations on matters referred to them to the Council. The committee reports reflect only what transpired at the meeting. If a majority of Members present at committee meetings are in agreement, they sign the report. If a majority is not in agreement on a recommendation, the report is submitted to the full Council without a recommendation. These reports require Council motions to come up for consideration. If a bill is on the agenda but the committee fails to act because of no quorum, any member of the committee can submit the file to the Council. No ordinance shall be introduced for adoption until it has been submitted to the City Attorney for approval.

Bills can be forced out of committee by 2/3rds vote of Council. Members can request motions not to go to committee if approved by the Council President.

Appointments and removal of officers by the Mayor requiring confirmation of the Council are referred to the appropriate Council committee for a recommendation and report. If the committee does not act within 31 days, the Clerk gives notice to the Council that the deadline specified by the Charter is approaching. If the committee has not acted within 38 days, the Clerk must place the appointment on the Council's calendar.

Los Angeles' decision to have 15 committees, one for each of the Council's 15 Members, ensures that each member feels that they have control and a political stage from which to direct a key policy area. Although this structure is unique when compared to other cities, Council Members and their staffs have an overall positive view of the Committee system. One Council aide commented that this structure gives each member something that he/she "could be in control of" and decreased potential discord among the Members. The staffer also pointed out that since each member chairs a committee, he/she has the ability to determine how important to make that particular issue area. While there are mandated purposes for each committee, the chair also has a fair amount of discretion to decide how to use the committee to advance a particular issue area or vision.

Los Angeles' Committee system has considerable influence over the Council's decisions. In the words of one Council aide, the "committees are where the hard work is done". Substantive policy issues are taken up by each committee and details are hammered out by the staff and Members. When a proposal leaves a Committee, all of the issues are supposed to have been worked out, eliminating the possibility of a public floor fight. A Council staffer commented that the "Council floor is not the place to have an in-depth policy discussion—this happens in the committees".

The majority of the Council's 15 committees have three Members; however, three of the committees (Budget & Finance, Housing, Community & Economic Development and Public Safety) have five Members. These three committees are oversized because of their relative importance and desirability compared to the other twelve committees.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE LOS ANGELES COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Expertise. Council relies primarily on its committees to vet and come to consensus on policy and legislative issues.
- Decentralized Control. The 15 committee, 15-Council member structure ensures that all Members have control over at least one issue area.
- Well-respected. The Committee structure is highly regarded by Council Members and staffers as the place in which good policy is accomplished.

#### **WEAKNESSES OF THE LOS ANGELES COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Redundancy. The high number of committees means that often times issues can be heard in a variety of committees (e.g. environmental concerns can be heard in Commerce, Energy & Natural Resources, Environmental Quality & Waste Management, and Planning & Land Use Management).

- High committee to Council Member ratio. Structurally, a high committee to Council member ratio can slow down the process since more Members have control over more policy jurisdictions.

### **C. OAKLAND**

Oakland was chosen as a case study primarily because it has recently transitioned to a Council-Mayor form of government from a Council-Manager structure. It is also one of the largest cities in the U.S., has a high committee to Council Member ratio and the same number of Council Members as San Diego providing relevant comparison. Oakland also consciously structured its committees to reflect the organization of the executive branch, and it has a powerful Rules committee that handles the functions that many cities assign to the Presiding Officer.

Oakland has eight Council Members and six standing committees. The committees are as follows:

- Rules and Legislation (President chairs) – 4 Members
- Public Works – 4 Members
- Finance and Management – 4 Members
- Community & Economic Development – 4 Members
- Life Enrichment – 3 Members
- Public Safety – 4 Members

The Council President appoints committee chairs, vice chairs and Members, subject to confirmation by a majority of the Council. There are four Council Members on each committee; a quorum is three. The Life Enrichment committee currently has three Members due to a Council vacancy. Committee chairs are appointed to two-year terms beginning in January of each new Council term. Council Members may be removed from committees for three or more unexcused late arrivals or absences. Ad hoc and other standing committees are created by the whole Council. The committees meet the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The Rules committee meets every week. The Rules committee can recommend that committees meet at other times, subject to Council approval.

Oakland's committees are "not really staffed", Council aides commented. A representative from the City Administrator's office and someone from the committee's corresponding department provide explanations on issues in front of the committee. The representative from the corresponding department also provides written recommendations and reports to committees.

The Rules committee determines committee jurisdiction. The Rules committee also has docketing authority and refers measures to committees. All bills are referred unless a majority of the Rules committee determines a bill should go to the Council.

Committees are authorized to study and analyze all facts relating to any subjects within their jurisdiction. The committees report to and submit recommendations to the Council for action. Committees may postpone, continue or table items by a majority vote.

By a majority vote Committees forward recommendations to the full Council. A committee may, as a condition of approval, request additional information be presented for consideration when the full Council hears the item. Failure to approve any recommended action results in the item not being forwarded to the full City Council. Committees may, by a majority vote, propose alternative recommendation(s) be forwarded to the full Council for consideration and final action.

It was expressed to DSG that Oakland's Council committees act as administrative reviewing bodies before issues are put before the full Council. Specifically, committees vet detailed proposals that come from the executive branch.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE OAKLAND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Department correlation. Committees directly correlate with departments, providing a clear line of communication between department heads and Council Members.
- Expertise. Council uses committees to vet legislation.

#### **WEAKNESSES OF THE OAKLAND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Committee staffing. Council relies on executive staff for explanations and reports.
- High committee to Council Member ratio. Structurally, a high committee to Council member ratio can slow down the legislative process since more Members have control over more policy jurisdictions.

#### **D. SAN FRANCISCO**

San Francisco was chosen as a case study for the following reasons: it has a Council-Mayor form of government, it is one of the largest cities in the U.S., it has a small number of Council Members per committee and it only has two committee assignments per member.

San Francisco has 11 Members on the Board of Supervisors and six standing committees. The committees are as follows:

- Budget & Finance – 3 Members (5 for budget process)
- Government Audit & Oversight (President chairs) – 3 Members
- Rules – 3 Members
- City Operations and Neighborhood Services – 3 Members
- Land Use – 3 Members
- Joint City and School District Select Committee – 3 Members

The President of the Board of Supervisors appoints committee chairs, vice chairs and Members to committees for a two-year term beginning in January of each new term. The President also has the authority to determine the number and type of committees during the same two-year term. Each committee has a chair, vice chair and member--three Members total. One Supervisor's aide commented that three Members per

committee is the perfect size because it is manageable for staff in terms of providing support to the Supervisors, it is an odd number, and it is not too many people for citizens to address regarding an issue. For joint committees, the Chair is the chair of the first committee and the Vice Chair is chair of the second committee. Committees meet once or twice a month, except for the Fiscal committee, which meets every Wednesday. All committees allow for public comment.

Each committee has a clerk and the support of the legislative analysts. The legislative analysts have just recently changed their reporting structure to work primarily for committees. People DSG spoke to in both the OLA and Board staff said it was too early to determine the effectiveness of having legislative analysts working directly with committees.

The Board President refers proposed legislation and subject matter hearings to one of the standing or special committees for public hearing. The item is assigned to a committee's agenda by the Clerk. Committee chairs determine whether and when to calendar matters for hearing--this responsibility is what one Supervisor's office said was the primary power regarding committees. All matters to be heard by committee must be advertised 72 hours before the scheduled meeting and no more than five Supervisors can attend and participate in a meeting (unless it is a joint meeting). In the event that the scope of committee assignments is conflicting, overlapping or ambiguous, the President determines which committee will have jurisdiction over a particular matter, subject to appeal by the Board. The Board can specify time limits for referred legislation. Measures become inactive after six months of not being heard by committee.

Committees can amend, report, table and/or continue measures. Measures are reported to the Board with a majority vote (2 votes). The reports may or may not include a recommendation.

When a measure is introduced, which would create or revise major City policy, the committee to which the measure is assigned cannot consider the measure until at least 30 days after the date of introduction. The determination of whether a measure involves a major policy issue is initially made by the Clerk of the Board, subject to reversal by the President of the Board.

Due to having only three Members per committee, there is a rule that Members cannot communicate with their committee counterparts outside of scheduled committee meetings. In a practical sense, this is somewhat difficult because Members run into each other in the hallways every day. It was explained to DSG that while some Board Presidents have been very strict regarding the rule, Members usually abide by it only on controversial matters.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Expertise. Council uses committees to vet legislation.
- Stability. Members serve on committees for two-year terms.
- Time efficiency. Committee to Council Member ratio is relatively low in comparison with other cities.

## **WEAKNESSES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Hallway quorum. With three Members per committee, Members are not allowed to discuss pending committee issues with their colleagues outside of committee meetings.
- Committee staffing. Due to the recent change of having legislative analysts assigned to committees, it is too early to determine effectiveness.

## **G. SEATTLE**

Seattle was selected for case study analysis because it has a Council-Mayor form of government, a small number of Council Members and a relatively large total population.

Seattle has nine Council Members and nine standing committees. In addition all nine Council Members sit on a Budget Committee that meets only during the budget process (it is not a standing committee). The standing committees are as follows:

- Finance & Budget – 3 Members
- Energy and Environmental Policy – 3 Members
- Government Affairs & Labor – 3 Members
- Housing, Human Services & Health – 3 Members
- Parks, Neighborhoods, & Education – 3 Members
- Public Safety, Civil Rights, & Arts – 3 Members
- Transportation – 3 Members
- Urban Development & Planning – 3 Members
- Utilities & Technology – 3 Members

Standing committees are formed through a process of discussion and consensus among Council Members, which is then submitted to the Members for ratification by resolution. This process includes the identification of committee scopes of work and the determination of meeting schedules, membership and chair assignments. If no consensus is reached, the Council President polls the Members and makes a decision, which is then submitted to Members for ratification by resolution. This occurs every two years after the election. Mostly, this process is a re-shuffling of committee members, not necessarily committees themselves, although they do have that option.

Chairs can be removed if they have served four years as Chair of the same committee and another member wants that Chairmanship.

According to the Seattle Council President's staff, the President has influence over this committee selection process, but lacks formal authority. The Council President may appoint special committees. Each committee has a chair, two Members and an alternate. Committees meet bi-monthly; the chairs can cancel meetings at any time and/or schedule special meetings.

Seattle's committees are staffed by the chair's legislative assistants and the central staff. Policy analysts are usually hired with a specific area of expertise and they are assigned to committees accordingly. There are between one to three assistants per committee.

The Council President refers legislation to committees and monitors standing committee agendas to ensure appropriateness. Council Members can "walk on" legislation, meaning that with a majority vote they can send legislation to a designated committee. This weakens the President's control over the process. Committee chairs set committee agendas, determine time allotments and invite comments.

Committees make recommendations to the full Council on Council bills, resolutions, clerk files and other reports they judge to advance the interests and promote the welfare of the City. Substantive discussion of bills usually takes place in committee, not on the Council floor. Bills that are reported to the Council must be accompanied by written reports. Committees can recommend that the full Council pass, not pass or provide no recommendation on bills. Committees can also choose not to report legislation, though legislation does not need a favorable vote to move out of committee.

A simple majority of the Council can call bills out of committee. At the end of the year the clerk determines what legislation has not been reported out of committee and that the Council is not interested in considering. These bills are bundled into a resolution that retires the bills for the permanent record.

One quirk of the Seattle system is that any nine of the Councilors can come to a committee and vote, even if they are not on that committee. In other words, if a Chair does not have the votes for a priority piece of legislation, he or she can ask other Councilors to come vote it out of committee. Alternatively, a member who wants to stop a piece of legislation from moving to the full Council with a "do pass" recommendation can enlist the help of other colleagues. This provides little incentive for Members to become true experts on their committee subjects and dramatically weakens the power of committees in relation to individual Councilors.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE SEATTLE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Expertise. Council uses committees to vet legislation.
- Staff. Committees are assigned staff with policy expertise.

#### **WEAKNESSES OF THE SEATTLE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

- Open voting. Any member of the Council can vote on any committee at any time. This can be done to pass something out of committee or to stop something in committee, drastically weakening the power of committees.
- Term limits. Chairs may be removed if they have been chair for four years and another Councilor wants that committee. Institutional expertise then leaves with that Chair.

#### **VI. CONCLUSION**



There is no one portfolio city structure that will suit all of San Diego's needs in maintaining/modifying its committee structure. In deciding the best structure for San Diego, DSG suggests that special attention be paid to the following:

- Purpose of committees; and
- Strength of committees relative to whole Council and Council President.